



South Carolina's Current Developments

*Celebrating 70 Years of Conservation
Helping People Help the Land*



January/February 2006

Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Dear NRCSers,

From the Office of the
State Conservationist

Walter W. Douglas



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NRCS in South Carolina is experiencing a busy and productive fiscal year 2006. We have many exciting programs and events coming up in the near future, which brings a heavy workload. But, as the South Carolina Conservation Partnership proved in 2005, teamwork is the key to getting conservation on the ground.

It was a pleasure to see many of you in Myrtle Beach for the Annual Conservation Partnership Conference, *Bridging the Gap*. I really enjoyed our new surroundings this year and look forward to returning in 2007. NRCS Chief Bruce Knight joined us during the conference and shared information on USDA's new Energy Initiative, which will help farmers and ranchers with high energy costs. He also mentioned the Small Farmer Initiative, which Secretary Johanns is expected to extend nationwide in 2006. South Carolina was a pioneer in getting this initiative off the ground in 2005, and we can be proud that we played an integral part of making this outreach effort a success. The sign-up for the initiative ends on February 10th and I encourage you to get the word out in your county so that small farmers will be aware of this opportunity.

I look forward to working together in 2006 for the conservation of South Carolina's natural resources.

photo: Lance Brewington, NRCS Soil Scientist, York County

Notes from the Field.....

I'm a Farmer--I'm Your Neighbor

Farm City Week Highlights from Oconee County

"I'm a farmer--I'm your neighbor." That's the slogan for the Oconee County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) campaign for Farm City Week. "Too many youngsters and adults are not aware of the amount of agribusiness in our county," stated George Grobusky, district chairman. "We felt it was time to introduce local consumers to local farmers."

Just how do you go about doing that? Well, the Oconee SWCD hatched a plan to place photographs of over 40 farmers in five local grocery stores during Farm City Week (November 21 - 28, 2005). The campaign signs not only included the farmer's photograph, but also provided a description of his/her product and how it impacts American families. "When shoppers stop to pick up ground beef for supper, they can read that a local farmer, their neighbor, is responsible for producing the calves that ultimately yield 118,000 pounds of beef," says Lee Keese, Oconee SWCD commissioner. "That's enough beef to feed 1,761 Americans for a year."

The campaign highlights beef cattle, broiler and breeder poultry, apples, honey, crops, dairy and timber operations. "Agriculture is still an important part of our local economy," said Rex Ramsay, district vice chairman. "Urban and industrial development is happening all around us. As our county grows, it is important to recognize what the agricultural community contributes to all of us--protection and conservation of our natural resources. Somehow we need to achieve a balance."

Oconee County SWCD Commissioner Marvin Prater adds, "We also are paying homage to

the generations of farmers and their families who have maintained this county's green space. Thousands of acres of forest, pastureland and crops provide us with cleaner air and water and give us rural views that make this county attractive recreationally."

Dorothy Lee, Oconee County SWCD secretary/treasurer said, "The district continues to be involved with natural resource protection by working with state and federal agencies, municipal and county governments, and private landowners. This campaign is our way of emphasizing to our part-

ners and the general public the tremendous impact farmers make on helping to carry out this very important mission."

NRCS District Conservationist Heather Stephens was instrumental in getting this unique project implemented. She pitched the idea to the local stores, interviewed local farmers, and helped create the displays.

The stores who generously agreed to participate in the campaign were Bi-Lo, Ingles, and Hometown Food Store.

For more information, contact Stephens at (864) 638-2213.



Oconee County NRCS District Conservationist Heather Stephens coordinated a unique project to highlight local farmers and their produce during Farm City Week 2005.



Stephens (right) interviewed Oconee County producer Gary Alexander who was one of the farmers highlighted in the Farm City Week project.

Save Energy--Save Money

USDA Promotes Energy Initiative

When he signed the Energy Policy Act in August 2005, President Bush said, "The bill recognizes that America is the world's leader in technology, and that we've got to use technology to be the world's leader in conservation...Energy conservation is more than a private virtue; it's a public virtue."



The USDA Energy Initiative will help farmers and ranchers with high energy costs and boost their bottom line. Many conservation measures can significantly reduce fuel use and other energy-related costs. NRCS' new Energy Estimator gives farmers and ranchers a quick read on how much money they can save by using conservation tillage.

Through this initiative, potential annual savings nationwide are enormous. Doubling no till acreage could save \$480 million of diesel fuel and converting irrigation systems from medium or high pressure to low pressure could cut energy costs by \$167 million. Improving water efficiency by just 10 percent could save farmers and ranchers about \$180 million, while doubling the use of manure-based nitrogen to replace fertilizer produced from natural gas could save about \$1.2 billion. And reducing application overlap on 250 million acres of cropland could save up to \$1 billion in fertilizer and pesticide costs, making a total potential savings of more than \$3 billion per year.

To help with this initiative, NRCS' new Energy Estimator gives farmers and ranchers a quick read on how much money they can save by using conservation tillage. It's simple and easy—just three

"clicks" on the computer. Producers enter



their zip code, fuel costs, crop plans and acreage and the Energy Estimator calculates estimated costs for various conservation tillage options versus conventional tillage. Based on the Revised Universal Soil

Loss Equation tillage and cropping database, this new tool is available on the NRCS website at www.nrcs.usda.gov under the special NRCS Energy Campaign.

Futhermore, farmers and rancher can improve thier energy cost by practicing one or more of the following:

- Switch from conventional tillage to no-till
- Move to low-pressure irrigation systems
- Replace old or inefficient irrigation pumps
- Use manure instead of petroleum-based fertilizers
- Better manage nutrient and pesticide applications through precision agriculture
- Improve pesticide use with scouting, spot spraying and integrated pest management
- Adopt management intensive grazing practices
- Plant windbreaks and shelterbelts to reduce heating and cooling costs

For more information, please contact your local USDA Service Center or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/energy/index.html.

Improving water efficiency by just 10 percent could save farmers and ranchers about \$180 million.

January 3-6

2006

Bridging the Gap



The 2006 South Carolina Conservation Partnership Conference was held January 3-6, 2006, at Kingston Plantation in Myrtle Beach, SC.

Conference highlights included the opening luncheon with keynote speaker Representative Daniel T. Cooper of Anderson County. The general session ended with a tour of Lewis Ocean Bay/Carolina Forest and a Beaufort Stew dinner.

Clemson University's "Your Day" live radio broadcast was on-hand Wednesday to conduct interviews with several speakers, including NRCS Chief Bruce Knight.

On Thursday, an awards banquet was held at the House of Blues. Four NRCS employees received Conservation Partnership Awards. They are pictured below.



Amy O. Maxwell, NRCS state public affairs specialist, left, was nominated for a Conservation Partnership Award by the Anderson SWCD. Walter W. Douglas, NRCS state conservationist, presented her with the award.



Jonathan Todd, NRCS agricultural engineer, left, and Larry Cantrell, field engineer, right, were nominated for a Conservation Partnership Award by the Marion SWCD. Walter W. Douglas, NRCS state conservationist, presented them with the award.



Ross Stewart, NRCS soil conservationist, right, was nominated for a Conservation Partnership Award by the Pickens SWCD. Walter W. Douglas, NRCS state conservationist, presented him with the award.

2006 Conservation Partnership Conference



**Scenes from the
2006 Conference**

Two South Carolina Developments Receive SCDNR Award

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources recently announced the winners of the 2005 Stewardship Development Award. This year's winners are the North Augusta Greenway Trail, and Phase I of Palmetto Bluff, a development of Crescent Resources.

"The projects were chosen because they exhibited thoughtful stewardship of the environment through careful planning and construction," said Freddy Vang, deputy director of DNR's Land, Water and Conservation Division.

The Stewardship Award program provides technical assistance and outreach for interested landowners. For more information on the Stewardship Development Program, contact program manager Richard Scharf at (803) 734-9135 or check the DNR Web site at <http://www.dnr.sc.gov/water/envaff/river/natrestewardship.htm>.

POWER For Wildlife Program Application Deadline is Jan. 31

A statewide program designed to create and maintain wildlife habitat beneath electrical transmission lines is successfully completing its seventh year, and the application deadline for taking part in the program is Jan. 31, 2006.

P O W E R (Protecting Our Wildlife at Every Right-of-Way) for Wildlife is funded by participating utility companies and electric cooperatives in South Carolina and offers cash grants for wildlife habitat enhancement on eligible utility corridors. Recipients must agree to maintain practices for at least five years and will receive up to \$1,000 over the five-year period.

If you own or lease eligible lands and would like to participate in this program, contact your local USDA-NRCS office, SWCD office, Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) office, or the SCDNR Small Game Project in Columbia at (803) 734-3609.

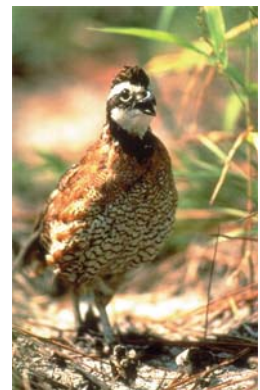


DNR's Wild Quail Management Seminar Coming in March

Bobwhite quail populations in South Carolina and the Southeast have been declining steadily over the past 50 years due to land use change and reduction in suitable habitat. The 19th Annual Wild Quail Management Seminars, sponsored by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources and the S.C. State Committee of Quail Unlimited, are designed to instruct landowners and land managers in the proper techniques of creating habitat that will support native populations of bobwhite quail.

Two seminars will be conducted over a three-day period, March 9-11, 2006, at the Webb Wildlife Center in Hampton County. The registration fee is \$75 and includes meals, overnight accommodations and seminar materials. Space is limited, so register early to reserve a slot in one of the two sessions. For more information write: Quail Management Seminars, DNR, PO Box 167, Columbia, SC 29202, call the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Small Game Project in Columbia at (803) 734-4306, or e-mail barnesj@dnr.sc.gov.

Field demonstrations and classroom instruction will focus on habitat practices including firebreak establishment, prescribed burning, timber management, brush control, discing for natural foods and supplemental food patch plantings. Presentations will be given on wild quail natural history, biology, diseases and parasites, predation and other factors that may be contributing to the population decline. An update on current research will also be presented. Speakers will include wildlife and forestry professionals from state and federal agencies.



Conservation Bank Awards \$8.25 Million to Protect 4,095 Acres in South Carolina

On October 20, 2005, the S.C. Conservation Bank Board approved \$8.25 million to fund conservation easements and fee simple purchases, protecting 4,095 acres of land for agriculture, wildlife habitat, recreation, education and other conservation projects.

Members of the S.C. Conservation Bank Board identified the approved projects as significant lands that, if conserved, would improve the quality of life in South Carolina, provide enhanced public access and protect valuable wildlife habitat and agricultural lands.

"Funding approved by the Conservation Bank Board totaled \$8.25 million and adds another 4,095 acres, bringing the total number of acres conserved by the Bank to 33,077," said Marvin Davant, S.C. Conservation Bank executive director. "The board funded 17 proposals in 13 counties, located in every area of the state. The protection of this diversity of ecosystems represents a partnership between government and a large number of private entities." Examples of projects approved by the Conservation Bank Board include:

- \$692,430 to purchase 41 acres of the Chinquapin Greenway in Spartanburg County, an urban park that will be home to a portion of the Palmetto Trail in the Upstate. The tract also has historical significance in that it was the location of Spartanburg's first water system in the 1880s.
- Phase II of the Ashley River Plantation District Project in Charleston and Dorchester Counties. The Conservation Bank Board approved \$2 million to purchase 12,280 acres.
- \$2 Million for 271 acres of Phase II of the Cleveland-Wilson Farms properties in Greenville County.

The S.C. Conservation Bank is funded through a portion of the state documentary stamp tax. The Conservation Bank has operated its administration this fiscal year entirely from interest income from these funds reserving all of its stamp revenues for land conservation.

The next meeting of the Board is scheduled for June 20, 2006, in Columbia. Application deadlines are March 31 and July 31 of each year. More information on the S.C. Conservation Bank is available on the Web at <http://SCCBank.SC.Gov> or call (803) 734-3986.

USDA Announces Sign up for Small Farmer Initiative Sign up Ends February 10, 2006

USDA-NRCS State Conservationist Walter W. Douglas announced that applications are being accepted for the Small Farmer Initiative in South Carolina. Eligible applicants may receive cost-share assistance not to exceed \$25,000. The purpose is to increase participation by small scale and limited resource farmers in USDA programs. The target audience is defined as small farmers who have historically not participated or not ranked high enough to be funded in previous program sign ups. Douglas said, "This initiative will help us to better serve small farmers who may be economically challenged and cannot produce the quantities of a large farmer in today's competitive agricultural market." The sign up period is underway and ends February 10, 2006.

The funds will help farmers whose entire farming operation consists of 197 acres or less (a 5% variance is allowed). To be eligible, at least 10 percent of the cropland acres must be planted to alternative crops. Alternative crops are not traditional crops such as cotton, soybeans, rice, grain sorghum, field corn, wheat, or similar crops grown on large acreage and produced for off-farm sales.

Priority will be given to applicants addressing the following resource concerns: surface water quality, water quantity, and soil quality. Contracts will be for a length of five years, and participants will be required to keep financial, nutrient, and pest management records for the length of the contract period.

Additional information for small farmers is on the Web at www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/equip/Small_farmer_initiative2006.html or call NRCS Small Farmer Liaison Wilfred Pace at (803) 253-3314.

PERSONNEL NEWS

NEW EMPLOYEES

◆ Kristina Jerome, GS-0457-09, was selected as a Soil Conservationist in the Sumter Field Office, effective October 30, 2005.

PROMOTIONS

◆ Bobby McQueen was promoted to Civil Engineer Technician, 0802-06, in the State Office, effective October 16, 2005.

◆ David Andrews was promoted to District Conservationist, GS-0457-11, in the Chester Field Office, effective October 16, 2005.

◆ Edward Mitchell was promoted to Soil Conservationist Technician, GS-0458-06, in the Walterboro Field Office, effective December 25, 2005

Shaun Worley, was promoted to District Conservationist, GS-0457-11, in the Edgefield Field Office, effective December 25, 2005

RESIGNATION

◆ Alerick Varner, Soil Conservationist, Hampton Field Office, resigned effective November 5, 2005.

◆ Erica Goza, Soil Conservationist, Edgefield Field Office, resigned effective January 8, 2006.

◆ Mark Mann, Soil Scientist, Bishopville Soil Survey Office, resigned effective October 27, 2005.

RETIREMENT

◆ Benjamin Stuckey, State Soil Scientist, State Office, retired effective January 3, 2006.

◆ Caroline Grant, Administrative Program Assistant, State Office, retired effective January 3, 2006.

◆ James Sanders, Ninety-Six District RC&D Coordinator, Greenwood Field Office, retired effective January 3, 2006.

◆ James Wilson, District Conservationist, St Matthews Field Office, retired effective January 3, 2006.

DEATH

◆ David Howe, Jr, District Conservationist, Aiken Field Office, died December 30, 2005.

Meet the New Hampton/ Allendale District Conservationist



Welcome to Diane Leone! She was born and raised in Massachusetts. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Plant & Soil Science from the University of Massachusetts, and has worked for NRCS for 18.5 years. Her career with NRCS started in Massachusetts as a soil conservationist in 1987 and then she became a district conservationist in 1991. She worked in three different field offices in Massachusetts, and in 2001 accepted a district conservationist position in Moscow, Idaho.

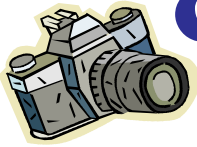
She and her husband Richard Yetter (soon to report to the State Office as the new Wildlife Biologist) wanted to get back to the east coast to be closer to family and be in a warmer climate. South Carolina seemed like a desirable place to relocate. She said, "The people of South Carolina have given us a warm welcome." Welcome to the Palmetto State!

Frank Wilcox Receives 2005 2nd Quarter Star Award

The National Employee Development Center (NEDC) recognized State Administrative Officer Frank Wilcox in FY '05. He received a 2005 2nd Quarter Star Award for identifying ways to improve the quality of NRCS' Training Needs Inventory (TNI) process. The new TNI process went into effect on June 1, 2005. Congratulations Frank!



Frank Wilcox, NRCS state administrative officer, was recognized by the National Employee Development Center in 2005.



Conservation Photo Contest Winners

First Place: Lance Brewington, NRCS Soil Scientist
Photo of York USDA Service Center



Second Place: Justin Rivers
District Technician, Chesterfield County.
"Pet Squirrel"



Third Place: Chris Graves
NRCS District Conservationist, Jasper County.
This copperhead was in the Four Holes Swamp
WRP easement in Orangeburg during Wetlands
Restoration and Enhancement Training.

In Memory of David Howe, NRCS District Conservationist, Aiken County

You will be dearly missed

